

Tradition 3 // Twelve and Twelve Notes

Short Form:

The only requirement for A.A. membership is a desire to stop drinking.

Long Form: Our membership ought to include all who suffer from alcoholism. Hence we may refuse none who wish to recover. Nor ought A.A. membership ever depend upon money or conformity. Any two or three alcoholics gathered together for sobriety may call themselves an A.A. group, provided that, as a group, they have no other affiliation.

Questions as you Read

p140 Have you let fear dictate how you view other people in AA?

p141 Have you seen someone who you viewed as troublesome recover in AA?

p142 Is it possible for a person to break AA? How?

p143 How do we, as a fellowship, deal with situations where there seems to be a conflict between traditions? In this case, his (Ed's) behavior was disruptive to the unity of the group, leading to an apparent conflict between the first and third traditions. Discuss.

p145 Have you witnessed (or been) a person with no faith acquire faith in AA?

How can I apply the spirit of open membership to other areas of my life?

Tradition Three Checklist

From the Grapevine, November 1969

- In my mind, do I prejudge some new AA members as losers?
- Is there some kind of alcoholic whom I privately do not want in my AA group?
- Do I set myself up as a judge of whether a newcomer is sincere or phony?
- Do I let language, religion (or lack of it), race, education, age, or other such things interfere with my carrying the message?
- Am I over impressed by a celebrity? By a doctor, a clergyman, and ex-convict? Or can I just treat this new member simply and naturally as one more sick human, like the rest of us?
- When someone turns up at AA needing information or help (even if he can't ask for it aloud), does it really matter to me what he does for a living? Where he lives? What his domestic arrangements are? Whether he had been to AA before? What his other problems are?

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The man with "another addiction" p142

Source: Bill W. talking at an open meeting of the 1968 General Service Conference

"At about year two of the Akron Group, a poor devil came to Dr. Bob in a grievous state. He could qualify as an alcoholic all right. And then he said, "Dr. Bob, I`ve got a real problem to tell you. I don't know if I could join AA because I am sex deviate."

Well that had to go out to the group conscious. You know. Up to then it was supposed any society could say who was going to join it. And pretty soon the group conscious began to seethe and boil and it boiled over. And under no circumstances could we have such a coward and such a disgrace among us said these gentlemen.

And you know, right then our destiny hung on a razor edge over this single case. In other words, would there be room that could exclude so called undesirability's and that caused us in that time, and for quite a time with respecting this single case, to ponder what is the more important; the reputation that we shall have. What people should think? Or is it our character.

And who are we considering our record, alcoholism is quit as unlovely. Who are we to deny a man his opportunity, any man or women.

And finally the day of resolution came. And a bunch were sitting in Dr. Bob's living room arguing what to do. Where upon dear old Bob looked around and blandly said, "Isn't it time folks to ask ourselves, 'What would the Master do in a situation like this? Would he turn this man away?'"

And that is the beginning of the AA tradition that any man who has a drinking problem is a member of AA if he says so not whether we say so. Now I think that the import on this on the common welfare has already been sustained because it takes in even more territory than the confines of our fellowship. It takes in the whole world of Alcoholics Anonymous. Their charter to freedom to join AA is assured. Indeed it was an act in general welfare."

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Who is "Ed" (p145)?

This was Jim Burwell, a famous early A.A. figure, who had his last drink on June 16, 1938. He founded the first AA group in Philadelphia in February 1940, and helped start the first AA group in Baltimore. He participated in the debates over the pre-publication manuscripts of the Big Book in 1938 and 1939, and he is the one who is credited with the insistence that the phrase "as we understood Him" be inserted into the 3rd and 11th Steps.

So in Bill Wilson's interpretation, it was God himself -- "the hand of Providence" -- who told the AA fellowship that they were not to exclude atheists from their AA groups. The principal message (to Bill's mind) was one which was directed towards those AA members who had a strong belief in a personal God, people who wanted to talk about spirituality in biblical and Christian language. These members were deeply frightened by open atheism, that is, the total denial that God exists. But Bill was telling them that they nevertheless had to accept people into the fellowship who did not believe in God, because AA experience proved that these God-deniers also could be gotten sober in life-changing experiences.

It is important to note though, that in Bill Wilson's version of Jimmy Burwell's story as he published it here in 1953, it was completely assimilated into the genre of the traditional Protestant frontier revivalist conversion story. In effect, he had Jimmy saying, "I was once a drunkard and a Godless wretch, abandoned by all right-thinking people, when suddenly I was SAVED by an overwhelming spiritual experience which coursed through me, when I stretched out my shaking hand and opened the sacred text of Christ's own holy book."

Bill Wilson put Jimmy's story into the basic format of the nineteenth-century and early twentieth century evangelical Protestant conversion story. But in doing so, was he not gravely altering and distorting Jimmy Burwell's real story, which explained NOT how an atheist found Christ or the biblical God, but how an atheist found his own kind of salvation.

In 1955, Jimmy Burwell was allowed to write his story in his own words -- it was entitled "The Vicious Cycle" -- for the second edition of the Big Book (pages 238-250). Or at least a good deal more of it was Jim's own ideas and his own words. He began by emphasizing the way in which forcing religion down people's throats in a way which gives them no freedom and no choice, can produce a horrible backlash, turning out men and women who believe that exact opposite of what the neurotic authority figures are trying to coerce them into believing.

Read Jim Burwell's full story in the second edition of the Big Book (1955): the Vicious Cycle or in "Experience, Strength, and Hope"

Read the full source at <http://hindsfoot.org/atheistburwell.html>